A MAN IN THE HOUSE

By ELSIE SINGMASTER

I

It was very seldom that visitors reached the door of the Shindledecker sisters without being heard, but one January morning this feat was performed by a mysterious creature. The sisters had risen with an unaccustomed feeling of oppression, which was probably due to the heavy supper of fresh sausage and funnel cakes, but which had in their minds a less material explanation. They had overslept, and this added to their unhappiness. Daylight had not come fully, but they had already fed the chickens and milked the cow, and carried the milk can down to the front gate, from where a neighbor took it with him to the creamery; but the hour was late for them.

"I don't know when we ate as late as seven o'clock," said Betsey as they sat at the table. Betsey was the younger and by far the larger. Her broad, plump body was dressed in soft gray, with apron and neckerchief to match, in the Mennonite fashion, and on her smooth hair was a close-fitting cap of transparent lawn with black ribbon ties which were not tied, but which hung upon her bosom. She ate slowly, and as if from a sense of duty, a long piece of sausage which she had warmed up. "I have such a weight on my heart this morning."

"I have too," confessed Tilly. Tilly was tall and stooped, and dressed in the same fashion as her sister. The two always agreed; they were more like the two halves of one being than two separate creatures. "It's very queer. I sort of shake inside when I look at the table, and the gray one" — it was thus that they alluded to their beautiful cat — "the gray one looks strange to me. Perhaps it's the thick fog; it's yet almost like night outside.

I believe it's the fog makes me feel so strange; it gets into the lungs."

"Perhaps," said Betsey. But she sighed heavily. "Now I will wash the dishes and you can sew."

"It's not yet light enough," said Tilly, moving toward the window. "But I'll get the things all laid out."

From a drawer in the old cupboard Tilly took two hand-woven baskets in which were sewing implements and multitudes of small colored scraps. The sisters were making a quilt in which several thousand tiny leaves, cut from figured calico, were to be appliquéd upon a white ground. They had left a narrow margin of white and this they were turning in, a labor which would take them many months. Tilly set a comfortable rocking-chair by each window and then turned to dry the dishes for her sister.

"It's no use to begin yet," she said with a sigh.

"No," agreed Betsey. "You have right." She, too, sighed. "I have still this great weight, Tilly. This is not for nothing."

"What do you think it means?" asked Tilly, trembling.

"Something is going to happen," declared Betsey. "You see if I'm not right. Even the gray one is uneasy."

The gray one sprang suddenly from his rug by the fireside to his rug on the chair and there lay waving his long tail. The sisters loved him dearly. When a dog occasionally chased him across their little fields, or out of their woodland at the rear, they had murder in their hearts. On such an occasion Betsey had been known to express a shocking sentiment.

"Would that all the dogs had one neck and I the ax!"

At eight o'clock the sisters sat down to their sewing, and at nine that morning something happened which Betsey had feared. They were well started on their delicate work when Tilly spoke with profound satisfaction.

"Anyhow, on such a day nobody will come to see us."

As Betsey answered with equal satisfaction, "You have right!" there was a thundering rap on the front door.

The sisters jumped out of their chairs, scattering spools and scissors far and wide. It was not merely a nervous reaction which moved them, but the necessity of protecting themselves by pulling down the shades and locking the door, which, however, they had already securely locked. Visitors came invariably to the back door — such was the custom of the neighborhood — and they were able to prepare for them. Who was this who pounded so boldly at the front? That door was opened only to carry out the dead; it was almost as though death had rapped.

"I told you so," said Betsey in a faint whisper. "I felt it. Be very quiet."

Tilly needed no warning; she was as quiet as the chairs and tables. A long time passed; the knock was repeated, then was heard no more. They waited an attack upon the rear, but none came. The clock ticked, the cat made a scratching sound with his long claws. Unable to stand, Tilly sank upon a chair.

"It's ten minutes," she said after a long time. "Don't you believe they're gone?"

Betsey made a commanding motion with her hand, then she vanished up the stairs. From a front window she could look down. She returned, trembling, and stood silently in the darkened room.

"What is it?" begged Tilly at last, in terror. "I would rather leave them know we are here than sit any more in the dark. It's an agent or some one, and we can just send them away."

Betsey raised the shade and let in the dim light.

"They're gone," she said in her deep voice.

"Who are gone?" faltered Tilly.

"I don't rightly know," confessed Betsey, in a tone of dread. "I just saw a sort of shape going down the walk toward the gate."

"Was it a man?" asked Tilly.

"I don't know. It went fast."

"What do you think it means?"

"I don't know," said Betsey. "Let us gather up our things and go on with our work. That we can do."

She sat down heavily and as she did so she looked at the cat. His green eyes glittered, his long tail waved sinuously to and fro.

"You wouldn't be any help to us in trouble," she said resentfully.

"It must have been a human being," said Tilly.

"I don't know what it was," said Betsey. "But it looked like a woman."

II

In the middle of the night the sisters lay talking. The night was bitter cold, and there were strange crackings in the old woodwork. Outside a hard-frozen crust gleamed and glittered under the moon, and the frost on the window-pane sparkled. The sisters wore flannel garments and knitted slippers and were covered by a great weight of quilts, not made of muslin with designs appliquéd for ornament, but of heavy woolen materials. The clothing of their ancestors for three generations rested upon Betsey and Tilly, all in blacks and browns and grays of fine quality. Only in the gay and fantastic stitches which bound the pieces together had natural human desires expressed themselves.

"We'll get early up," said Tilly. "I feel that to-morrow will be a good day for work."

"It will," said Betsey.

"I hope the gray one is warm," said Tilly.

"I hope everything is warm," said Betsey benevolently. "It will give a cold day to-morrow."

"Yes," said Tilly. "You have right."

"Whoever she was, she never came back," said Betsey. The sisters had decided that it was a woman who rapped so hard on their door on the misty morning.

"I guess she decided to mind her own business, wherever she is," said Tilly.

"Yes," said Betsey. "Now we will sleep."

"Yes," said Tilly. "But listen!" Tilly laid her hand upon her sister's arm. "I hear a noise like scratching!"

"It's the cat."

"It's louder than the cat."

"What is it then?"

"Listen!"

Betsey raised herself on her elbow.

Tilly was already sitting up, her nightcap pushed back over her ears. There was a sound as of sharp claws scratching on wood.

"The gray one," said Betsey. "Lie down."

"Those are longer and stronger than a cat's claws," said Tilly. "It's outside the kitchen door. It ——"

Tilly interrupted her own sentence with a loud scream. Something had leaped upon the bed. They flung themselves backward in an agony of fright and drew the coats and suits and dresses of many ancestors over them. But it availed nothing. The creature advanced, walked upon them, up the thickly covered leg of Tilly, upon the mountainous thigh of Betsey. It advanced toward Betsey's shoulders, wailing as it went.

"It's the gray one!" said Tilly hysterically from beneath the smother of clothes. "I believe it's all the time the gray one!"

Betsey was the braver of the two; her exploring hand touched a cold, wet nose and soft fur. It was the gray one.

"Shame on you!" she cried. "Shame on you! Such a thing you never did in your life. What ails you?"

With a little whimper the cat crept in between them. His body quivered like his voice.

"Listen!" said Tilly.

The scratching sound was louder, and it was accompanied by a sort of echo of the whimper in the bed.

"It's yet there, whatever it is," wailed Tilly.

"It cannot get in," said Betsey.

"Perhaps it's a wild beast," said Tilly. "It has come

out of the woods and it was after the gray one. Perhaps it smells human flesh now." Tilly's voice squeaked. "Oh, what shall we do?"

"It can't do us anything," said Betsey reassuringly, yet with deep concern. "The cow and the chickens are locked up safe, and we're locked up, and if we cannot get out in the morning and the milk is not in its place Herr will come in to see what's wrong."

"I wish we had a gun," said Tilly. "Will we have to lie here like this all night long?"

Suddenly Betsey made a heroic resolve, and without giving it time to weaken she sprang out and walked to the window. Frost did not quite cover it, and she looked into the brilliant night. "Oh!" whispered Tilly. "Oh!"

"It's walking back toward the woods," announced Betsey. "It's like a large dog."

"No dog can live by us," said Tilly. "Is it just one?"

"Yes," answered Betsey. "That's all, anyhow, that I can see."

"We can't have any dog here," said Tilly. "That's sure."

"Yes," said Betsey, climbing back into bed. "It's very, very cold. Now I hope we can sleep."

"Yes," said Tilly. "I'm glad the gray one is here by us."

"Good-night," said Betsey firmly.

"Good-night," said Tilly.

III

The morning was crisp, but not cold. The snow was gone, the day had appreciably brightened, the geraniums in the window bloomed with a vigor which seemed to belong to the spring. The chickens were fed, the cow milked, the can carried to the gate, the breakfast eaten, the dishes washed, and the sisters sat turning in the edges of the little leaves. They did not look well. Betsey's broad face was pale and Tilly's shoulders appeared to have bent over

another inch. They had lost sleep. The dreadful creature which scratched on their door would give them no rest. He came nightly and he had added a low, continual whining to his scratching. Betsey had bravely looked down upon him from the window and had described him to her sister.

"He's a big, homely one. His hair stands out like wire and his tail is cut off. I believe he was in a fight."

"I guess he was chased off from wherever he lived," said Tilly.

"He has a sort of long chin," Betsey went on; "a very long chin. When you see him from the side it is as if you tried to make a picture of him and got it out of shape."

"I guess he has had many blows," said Tilly.

"Why he don't go somewhere else I cannot see," said Betsey. "There are places where they like dogs."

"We do not like them here," said Tilly. "Do we?" She addressed the gray cat on his throne. He responded with a wave of his tail and a glitter of his green eyes.

Betsey rose and left her chair and opened the door into the cold front hall.

"I will get me the little stool to put my feet on," she explained. She closed the door behind her so that no heat should escape, and as the sound died away Tilly leaped up. She heard Betsey's steps in the hall and other steps outside. There was no time to get to door or window. Heaven send the door was locked! She dived under the table.

"Tap-tap-tap!" came a brisk knock at the outer door. "Creak!" went the inner door as Betsey opened it. She saw Tilly's feet and she meant to step back. Surely the door was locked! Then she saw a woman's face pressed against the pane. This was, she believed, the same woman who had vanished into the mist; perhaps someone had told her to go to the back door. Betsey stood motionless and staring.

The woman's black eyes were going round and round,

from the carpet on the floor to the old cupboard and the pink luster ware on the shelf. She realized at last that there was a large body by the inner door and that it was human. She tapped upon the pane.

"What do you want?" asked Betsey, her eyes upon Tilly's feet.

"I wanted to see if I could get board here," said a sharp voice which seemed to try to be pleasant.

"We don't take boarders," said Betsey.

"Wouldn't you take me for a few weeks?"

"Why, no," said Betsey.

"May I use your telephone?"

"We have no telephone," said Betsey.

The whole neighborhood would have laughed. The Shindledecker sisters would have used a telephone about as soon as an airplane.

The stranger's face was pressed against the pane, but her stretched-out hand was on the latch. Betsey saw the latch move, but it moved only a little.

"Tilly," she said in a low tone, "you stay where you are, but pull in your feet. I will go in the front of the house and just wait until she goes. Then I will come and tell you."

Moving with the stateliness of a great ship, Betsey stepped back into the cold hall from which she had emerged. It was a simple and dignified method of dismissal. She remained perfectly still until she guessed that ten minutes had passed, then she looked out through the crack. The woman stood with her face against the pane, her eyes going round and round. They were hungry eyes. What on earth did she want? Suddenly she turned away, and through the side lights of the front door Betsey saw her pass through the front gate.

"Get up, sister," she said, returning to the kitchen. She pulled down the shades on the porch "I will make me a little bitter tea to keep off the cold."

"What did she want?" asked Tilly, moving herself out

from under the table in a sitting posture. "I'm stiff as stiff. What did she want?"

"I think she's a little off," said Betsey.

"You are shivering," cried Tilly in alarm. "I will make the tea. You sit down and wrap the shawl round you. What are we to do?"

"I do not know," said Betsey. "Neither night nor day do we have any peace. Now look what is coming!"

From the woodland behind them advanced a large Airedale dog. Betsey had described him accurately; his hair was like wire, his tail had been cut off, his head was shaped like that of an old man with a long, long chin. But Betsey had not described his eyes, which were like soft, bright lamps; nor his teeth, which were like gleaming ivory; nor the motion of his tail, which was unceasing and regular, like part of a machine. He was very thin, but he was not uncheerful.

"He never came before in daytime!" wailed Tilly. "Look at him! How he glares at us!"

Betsey lifted the window. It was a safe distance above the ground, and she was careful not to open it far enough for the dog to leap in.

"I want you to go away," she said. "We have no room for you here. You may be all right in your own place. Besides, we do not like dogs."

It was with some difficulty that Betsey's kind heart delivered this final insult. The sight of her and the sound of her voice seemed to drive the creature out of his wits. He jumped toward the window, but she got it shut in time and he raced to the side door, barking like mad. Tilly sat down, teapot in hand.

"What will we do, sister?"

"I do not know," said Betsey. "I'm sure I do not know." She turned suddenly and looked at the cat on his chair. "I wish you were some good," she said a little bitterly. "You have teeth and claws. Some cats would not let such a dog come round." Then Betsey toyed with

a thought which was, to say the least, unmaidenly; in her calmer moments it would have seemed almost indecent. "Sometimes it seems as if it ought to be a man in every house."

IV

March was a snowy month and the light was often dim, but the porch shades were kept down. Betsey had found an old bolt in the barn and this she had added to the ancient and mighty lock on the door. Indifferent to their wishes, which had now been clearly stated to him, their nocturnal visitor continued his calls; but they could not stay awake all night to be afraid. They believed he slept on the cold porch and that made them uneasy.

"Even if he's a dog, he has feelings. I wish he would go in some warm place," said Betsey as they sat sewing.

"I wish he'd go altogether away from us," said Tilly. "I don't care where he goes from here. There are plenty of places where he can get warm. I just wonder where that woman is."

"She looked like an outlander," said Betsey. "I wonder is it true that they eat rats? She seemed like a learned woman, she spoke so proudlike."

"'*Je gelehrter, je verkehrter*,'" quoted Tilly. "'The more learned the more perverse.' I do not trust any of them. I ——"

"Rap-rap-rap!" echoed on the door. The sisters became motionless.

"Oh, please let me in!" said a pleading voice.

"It's her," said Tilly.

"I'm not well," said the pleading voice. "I must have help!" It was as pathetic as the voice of Cathy Linton crying in the night,[1] "Oh, please, let me in!"

To the authentic appeal of anguish no Shindledecker was deaf. Promptly, though in desperation, Betsey un-

[1] Reference to a scene in *Wuthering Heights*, a novel by Emily Brontë. The ghost of Cathy Linton sobs at the window, "Let me in — let me in!"

did the bolt and then turned the ponderous hand-wrought key. It was the woman who had twice visited them. She was inside before one could draw breath, and she sat down on the cat's cushioned chair, her eyes going round and round.

"I was passing and I was taken with a sort of faintness May I sit here a while?"

"Yes," said Betsey. Hospitality and concern struggled with distrust and won. "Shall I make you a little tea? It's good for such feelings."

"How kind you are," said the stranger, her eyes going round and round. "It would certainly revive me."

"It will take only a few minutes. The water boils already."

Betsey put a large portion of the bitter thoroughwort into the pot — large because there was little time for brewing. She meant to get this woman revived quickly To her guest tea meant English breakfast or orange pekoe, she had never heard of *durchwax* and *quental*.[1]

"What beautiful things you have!" she said, her eyes still going round and round.

"They are all old," said Betsey. "We have nothing new, except we sometimes make new quilts."

She was proud of her skill and that of Tilly, and she showed a little leaf and explained how there would be thousands of them. Meanwhile the stranger's eyes still went round and round. They paused upon the old walnut cupboard and lingered upon the luster ware on the mantel-shelf and flitted over the rocker with the Dutch roll and sparkled with a sort of bright horror at the sight of the old glass dish from which the gray one lapped his drinking water.

"Are all your things old?" she asked.

"Yes," said Betsey. "Old beds and old bureaus —

[1] Names used by the Pennsylvania Dutch for thoroughwort and wild thyme. These are medicinal herbs popular as household remedies and taken in the form of tea.

everything old." She spoke as though she were ashamed of her things; she was determined to show this stranger that they had nothing in common with her prosperity. "They are only fit to be thrown out."

"Would you exchange this cupboard for a kitchen cabinet, all fitted out?" asked the stranger. She tried to speak lightly, casually, indifferently. "I know some one who likes old things, and I believe he'd be foolish enough to exchange." Greedy and excited, she looked round and round. "He has a fancy for all sorts of old things — jugs like that, for instance. If I could get him to give you other jugs in exchange, would you do it?"

Betsey came forward with the steaming brew.

"It might be," she said politely. "Here; this will make you feel good. I put a little cold water in; it's not too hot."

In her excitement the stranger did not notice the odor, pungent as it was. She took a large swallow and an expression of agony came over her face. She believed she would be turned inside out and sit a woman reversed before their eyes. But she was not disconcerted even by this misadventure.

"I feel better," she said, rising and setting the cup down. "I must go."

She thanked them and went away and Betsey locked the door.

"Do you think she liked our old things?" asked Tilly.

"No," said Betsey. "That was put on."

"Do you think she felt bad?" asked Tilly.

"I don't like to think she would lie," said Betsey.

"Do you think she'll come back?" asked Tilly.

"I don't know," said Betsey. "I think she's a little queer, and you can't tell about such people. Oh, how I wish they would leave us alone."

V

In the evening the sisters went to prayer meeting. The little meeting-house stood just across the road and they

never missed a service. William Hershey, a faithful member, came early and started the fire and lit the two coal-oil lamps, and they went over at once. This evening there was a large attendance. William had brought his little wife and his three children in his buggy, little Amos sitting between them, little David on a stool on the floor and the baby in her mother's arms. William was a most devout and cheerful soul; it was good to be in his company. In addition, there were three others, Eleazer Herr, Lucy Erlenbaugh and John Steckbeck. Lucy Erlenbaugh was not cheerful; she was seen to weep through the service, and when William had concluded his final prayer they all turned to inquire her trouble and comfort her.

"It's my grandmother's clock," she sobbed.

"What?" said William, thinking she was losing her mind. "Why do you cry about your grandmother's clock, Lucy? Has it stopped?"

"It has gone away," explained Lucy. "A woman came and she bewitched me and took it away."

"Not bewitched you," corrected William. "There is no such thing."

William held this bold and advanced opinion in defiance of his friends.

"She hypnotized me," said Lucy. "She brought me a new clock instead with chimes and I took it. When I saw the old one going down the road I could of screamed. But she took it in an automobile and it's gone. She got my old settee that my gran'pop made. Oh, they will turn in their graves."

"It's too bad," said William. "What did she give you instead?"

"A rocker with a spring," wept Lucy. "I already put my fingers down the side and pinched them. I hate it."

"Was she a good-sized woman?" asked Betsey. "Tall, with black eyes and sort of mourning spectacles?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "Was she by you?"

"Yes," said Betsey.

"She'll take your things. She's so smooth-spoken you don't know what you're doing."

"I'll know what I am doing," said Betsey firmly. But she was filled with fear. She took Tilly by the arm. "Come," she said; "come quickly."

The house was as they had left it, lovely in the moonlight.

"I believe she would do anything," declared Betsey. "It's not safe to go off."

"Not to meeting?" said Tilly, astonished.

"No, nor to bed," said Betsey. "I thought I was all the time discouraging her, but I was leading her on. She does want old things — for what, heaven knows. She will surely come back. I'm going to sleep here on the settee."

"Your bones will wear through!" protested Tilly.

"I don't care," was the grim response. "Better that than she should get our things."

"The dog might scratch through!" cried Tilly, aghast.

"I would rather be eaten by him than that she should get our things," declared Betsey.

VI

The March twilight, late as it was, fell before Betsey painfully completed her milking. Tilly had a cold and she had not gone with her. Tilly had caught the cold creeping from her warm bed down to the kitchen to see that Betsey was safe, and Betsey was stiff because of the hardness of the boards upon which she lay. The settee was narrow and she was broad; she had not been able to shift her position all night long for four nights. There had been no scratching outside; the lazy purring of the gray one and the little whispers in the stove were all that broke the quiet. The gray one purred as though he thought Betsey endured this misery to keep him company. The dog had gone, probably for good. Betsey was certain he was not there, because once or twice in each night she

had gone to the door and made upon it, low down, a scratching sound with her own fingers. There had been no response, but she was clearly not quite reassured as she went back to her hard couch, for she looked vaguely disappointed and unhappy.

As she sat on her milking stool, her forehead laid affectionately against the comfortable side of her cow, a shadow fell upon her and she looked up. A figure stood in the doorway; against the dim sky it appeared gigantic. It wore a long cape which made it appear shapeless. Betsey sat paralyzed. A hand reached out from the formless mass and seized hold of the key of the barn door, a very ancient and remarkable key which wound and unwound.

"How extraordinary!" said a voice which Betsey recognized at once. Still paralyzed, she did not respond.

"And look at the hinges," said another voice. "You've struck it this time, Cora."

Betsey discerned a second figure behind the first. The cow touched the pail with her foot.

"Is anybody in here?" asked Cora's familiar voice.

"I'm here," said Betsey.

"I have brought my friend to see your things." Honey seemed to drip into the still cold air. "You're willing, I know. You were so kind to me."

Betsey lifted her pail and came out into the brighter light. The second figure, which was that of a man, stepped forward.

"Let me carry it for you." Honey dripped again.

"No, thank you," said Betsey. "I can carry it."

A lump came into her throat. She was outside her house and she would have to go in, and they would go in with her. The sun had set, but its light shone suddenly up against a cloud, and the world brightened. She could see at the gate an automobile and behind it a truck. In it were large objects; one might be a kitchen cabinet, others bureaus with swinging mirrors. She staggered a little

and the stranger put out his hand again and spoke in accents of learning and refinement, also in the accents of a great desire.

"You must let me carry it, madam."

The milk pail was passing from her hand, and with it all her hopes of being able to resist, when there was a new sound, not at all honeyed, in the still air. Something moved at the corner of the barn and a dog came and stood by Betsey. His wirelike hair stood on end, his stump of a tail stood straight out, his white teeth showed.

"Is this your dog?" said the man quickly.

"Is he cross?" asked the woman with a little break in her voice.

Betsey answered the second question.

"I'm afraid he's very cross," she said.

The stranger seized her pail firmly, as if to hasten their entry into the safe house. The dog came forward and again he spoke, this time more loudly.

"Now, Ponto!" remonstrated the strange woman called Cora.

If Betsey had had breath, she would have said "We must run, he will eat us!" But she had no breath. Her mind still worked, however, and she heard and understood an astonishing remark uttered by the man.

"He thinks he must defend you from us. I guess I'd better let you have the pail."

While they moved along, Betsey's mind continued to work. The dog stepped close beside her; she could hear him breathe and feel his body.

"Is he very cross?" asked the woman, hesitating at the porch step.

"Yes," said Betsey positively and with a slightly dull tongue; "wery, wery cross."

"He won't object to our coming in, surely, if you are with us?" said the man.

"Oh!" cried Betsey as if in a passion of mortification and embarrassment. "Oh, I would be afraid for you to

come in. His teeth are very sharp; he has clawed the door almost through."

As if to emphasize her remark, the dog uttered a growl which shook her very bones.

"You oughtn't to keep such a dog," said the man, a little impatiently. He had taken at least four steps away from the porch.

"We will come by daylight," said the woman determinedly. She, too, was moving down the walk. "We'll go now, but we'll come again."

Betsey made no polite response; the amenities of civilization were not, of course, understood in this lonely and benighted community.

"Perhaps you'd better go with us to the gate," said the man nervously. "You know, you're responsible for a savage dog."

"Oh, you won't hurt us, will you, Ponto?"

Cora apparently meant to depart with dignity and in a spirit which would make a return possible, but there were frightened runs and trills in her voice.

Suddenly great courage and a great calm spread through the mind and soul of Betsey.

"He will stay by me," she said. She gave the dog a queer name, but one which was common in the neighborhood. "You stay by me, Whisky." She felt him against her and a thrill went through her whole body. The thrill was transformed into a sort of mischief. "Go quick, though."

VII

Betsey and Tilly sat up late, beside the beautiful and ancient kitchen table. Before them was a square of wood measuring about two by three feet which had once been the lid of a box. Tilly, as artist, was putting words upon it. They had a little black paint, and fortunately the lid was white. Their cheeks were red, their hands trembled, and occasionally they exchanged a troubled sentence.

The gray one also seemed to be troubled. He lay upon his cushioned chair, moving his tail, and now and then uttering an angry miaow.

"'Cross' is a *leppish*" — insipid — "word for this," said Betsey.

"But 'savage' is such a bad word," said Tilly. "Herr, he might be afraid to stop for the can."

"We will tell him, of course. But I believe there's yet a better word."

Various problems were discussed and settled; but for the most part Tilly worked intently. Presently a subject was opened which brought a brighter flush to their cheeks.

"It was all the time that he liked us!" said Tilly as if incredulously. "That was why he came."

"There's one thing I'm glad of," said Betsey. "That is, we had such good, fresh sausage to give him."

"Do you think he will be willing to eat all the time pork?" asked Tilly solicitously.

"No," said Betsey. "I thought of that. There's something you can buy called dog cake. William Hershey will get us some of that in the store."

"I wonder if he's yet out there."

As if in answer there came a little scratching.

"I know what he wants," said Tilly timidly. She turned and looked at the cat in a humble way.

"What good did that one ever do us?" said Betsey grimly. "Are you done?"

"Yes," said Tilly, with an excited gasp. "You're not going to put it up to-night, though?"

"I am," said Betsey. "It'll stand on the fence rail and lean against the tree. If they come in the early morning they'll see it. I'll not smear it. To-morrow when it's dry I'll nail it up."

As if excited by the motion within, the creature outside scratched gently, but with a determination like that of a terrier after a mole.

Betsey held up the sign. The Shindledeckers sewed ex-

quisitely, but they were not expert spellers. The lettering, however, was not bad, though the letter S was reversed.

"You're sure you're not afraid?" asked Tilly in uneasy admiration.

"Sure."

Betsey lifted the sign and Tilly opened the door. It was touching to see with what eager affection their guest and protector regarded them. Eyes were a-shine, teeth a-grin, tail a-bob.

"Come on," said Betsey, stepping out on the porch and off.

The dog uttered a whine of joy and gamboled beside her down the path. It was as she had anticipated; she could place the sign securely on the crossbar of the paling fence and lean it against the tree. It scarcely needed to be nailed. In the moonlight the words were plain and she read it with satisfaction — before she went with her dignified rocking step up toward the house. It said:

BEWAIR
THE ANGRY DOG
ADWISE
DO NOT COME IN

Back on the porch she stood still. Tilly waited in the doorway, shivering in her shawl. Within, the gray one stood on his throne, aghast, his back arched in a narrow parabolic curve. Without, were the eager eyes, the shining teeth, the palpitating tail. These Betsey addressed, very humbly, a little fearfully, but more hopefully than fearfully. The amenities of polite society were, after all, not unknown.

"Will you come once in," she said, trembling, "and sit a little while by us?"

The dog walked in; he grinned with the rapture of a

patient lover surprised by a bliss in which he had never dared to believe; there was something about him at once human and delightfully idiotic. The gray one abdicated. Ascending as on wings, he sat among the luster ware on the mantel. To him the new arrival paid no heed; uttering a long sigh, he lay down before the stove. There was a little silence as the sisters returned to their multitudinous leaves.

"They say dogs bathe themselves in summer," remarked Tilly, a little absentmindedly. "He will doubtless bathe himself back in the pond." Then, as if she had said something a little impolite, she hastened to add, "He is fine company. He will take care of us. We have now a man in the house."

"He is better than a man," said Betsey with conviction. "He takes up less room, and he cannot talk and he will do as he's told." Suddenly a grimly humorous expression brightened her soft eyes. "I don't believe any man would bite that Cora, but he would bite her in a minute. *Ach*, how I shall sleep to-night!"

ELSIE SINGMASTER

ELSIE SINGMASTER LEWARS, who writes under her maiden name, is a Pennsylvanian by birth and residence. Most of her early life was spent in Lehigh County where she acquired a knowledge of the Pennsylvania Germans which formed the basis for her first literary work. She was a student first at Cornell, then at Radcliffe, and was graduated from the latter institution in 1907.

For twenty-five years she has lived in Gettysburg, and the battlefield with its stirring history has furnished her with many themes. She has published stories in the *Century*, *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *Outlook*, *Pictorial Review*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and other magazines. In addition five novels, various books for young people, a volume of short stories, and one of biography make up her list of published works. Her last novel, *Keller's Anna Ruth*, was published in March, 1926. The Shindledecker Sisters, to whom you are introduced in

A Man in the House, are the center of interest in many of her latest short stories.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. How soon in the story do you realize the significance of the title? How do the concluding sentences justify the choice of the title?
2. Often in real life chance remarks betray character or give a glimpse into the life of the speaker. With this thought in mind find the context of these remarks and discuss their significance:
   a. "I don't know when we ate so late as seven o'clock."
   b. "I don't like to think she would lie."
   c. "Not to meeting?" said Tilly.
   d. "I don't believe any man would bite that Cora."
   e. "No dog can live by us."
   f. "They say dogs bathe themselves in summer."
3. Note that the description of the dog is not concentrated in any one paragraph. Find and read aloud in class, words, phrases, or sentences which describe him. When all details are thus brought together, do you seem actually to see the dog? What is his breed?
4. How do Betsey and Tilly differ in character? Find definite passages in which this difference is suggested. Why does Betsey look "vaguely disappointed and unhappy" when she goes to the door at night and finds the dog not there? Trace the change in attitude towards dogs from Betsey's, "Would that all dogs had one neck and I the ax!" to Tilly's, "We have now a man in the house." What reason does Betsey give for pronouncing Whisky "better than a man"?
5. Read *The Gala Dress*, by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and compare it with this story. Both stories center about two elderly women living alone but in very different sections of the country. Reconstruct and compare the social backgrounds suggested in the two stories. Which story is the more humorous? In each story a third person is essential to the plot. Show how this is true. Compare the style of the two authors. How do the two stories differ entirely in theme?

5. For good stories by Elsie Singmaster watch the current magazines. These of her stories are especially recommended:

The Courier of the Czar
A Lear in Shireman's Gass
November the Nineteenth
Salt of the Earth
Amishman
Little and Unknown
Sound in the Night
Zion Valley